REMINISCENCES OF THE OLD NAVY.

Dewey as an Adjuster—How Mike Made Peace in the Main-Top.

By W. W. STONE.

Lieut.-Commander George Dewey was in a brown study.

No, he was not planning a bloody campaign, nor was he in love—then.

He was bowed down momentarily beneath a fit of deep disgust and disappointment.

He was sitting on a campstool by my office table, between two great Columbiads on the starboard side of the gun deck. His right elbow was resting on the table and his partly-closed hand tapped softly a nervous tattoo that sounded like the muffled drum-beats of a lost hope.

Three weeks before the time of which I am now writing (October, 1866) Dewey had been appointed Executive Officer of the "Colorado," succeeding Lewis A. Kimberley, now Rear-Admiral, retired. Kimberley had been promoted to the rank of commander, and was on his way home to take command of the U. S. receiving ship "Vermont," lying in the New York Navy Yard Basin.

Dewey was not new to the "Colorado," nor to the existing conditions. He had been acting as Flag Lieutenant for Admiral Goldsborough for a short time, hence when spoken of as likely to get the appointment of "First Luff," the rising and ambitious young officer stipulated that when he took charge all offenders should be pardoned, the brig, or ship's prison, vacated, and the entire ship's company be given a clean bill of moral health.

Capt. R. H. Wyman, or "Black Jack," as he was called by the ship's company, was strongly opposed to this; but Dewey was persistent, and being seconded by our bluff old Admiral, finally won.

There were several hard cases in the brig. Some were confined for complicity in the robbery of Fleet Paymaster Cunningham's safe. Several thousand dollars had been stolen. The principal thief was a ward-room negro waiter named Watts. Among the better class of prisoners was a runaway boat's crew, formerly belonging to the Admiral's barge, all likely young fellows, some of them today prosperous business men in the East, one of them at least a past officer in the National Encampment. Beside these there were the usual number of drunks, fighters and rebellious sailormen.

I have an explanation for this condition of things, an explanation which may serve as a hint to some of the well-meaning but mistaken officers of our present White Navy.

You must know that my position as Ship's Clerk gave me an opportunity to witness cause and effect; more so, possibly, than any other personage aboard the frigate. I was, as Ship's Writer, neither officer nor private—a sort of Mahomet's coffin swinging 'twixt heaven and—well, terra firma. I stood in a kind of half-way house, mixing freely with both ends of the ship.

To start, then, from the beginning: On the 24th of May, 1865, Lieut.-Commander Kimberley went on board of the receiving ship "North Carolina," and had the men all lined up on the upper deck. Going down the line, followed by a clerk, Kimberley selected the likeliest, most intelligent, cleanest and nattiest-looking fellows he could find. The clerk took the names and records. The next day, May 25, these men were sent aboard of the "Colorado," and she went into commission. I mention this because I want my readers to understand that we had the finest, cleanest, best-looking set of fun-loving, jolly young fellows that ever sailed out of New York Harbor. With material such as this, America's bravest, best blood, failure to get the very best results must be attributed to lack of the proper quantity of knowledge, tact and sympathy necessary to utilize the excellence at hand.

The "Colorado" was well worthy of her crew. She was a trim, stately, well-equipped frigate. She had been selected as the showiest of her class to go over to Europe after the close of the civil war to show the people on the other side of the water that, far from being either dead, or even sick, we were very much alive, and some of our rollicking sailormen succeeded only too well in this respect.

A large percentage of our crew were veterans from the Gulf and Atlantic Squadrons. Many of them—fierce and effective fighters in the bloody battles of the previous years—had been too lavish of their pay, and hence were behind on the ship's books. This estopped them from "liberty on shore," and was a great cause for discontent.

I am compelled reluctantly to confess that Kimberley's nature and temperament unfitted him for the task of controlling and training this stirring aggregation of muscular young Americans. We were, confessedly, in a holiday ship. The officers laughingly avowed that they were on a picnic. Aft, peace had spread her wings and plenty stood with her horn turned upside down. Balls, parties, concerts, receptions followed in rapid succession.

Forward of the mainmast a different state of things existed. Here everything was on a war footing. Guns had to be kept polished, decks whitened, sails and masts made presentable. This perpetual grind might have been borne with more patience had there been some show of consideration in granting the little privileges so dear to Jacky's heart, but concessions were apparently wrung from the Executive as slowly as juice from a hard apple. The crew resented this. They attributed the reluctance to the promptings of a soured and morose nature.

In this they were wrong. Kimberley's whole soul was wrapped up in duty. He took no pleasure outside of his profession, and he could see no reason why men were not satisfied who had plenty to eat and drink, and a good bed to sleep in, after the work was done. I guess that's why so many ministers' sons go wrong. Parents don't appreciate the fact that there must be human sympathy and a reciprocity of benefits to make good children, and your man-of-warsman is a child in some respects.

Kimberley was a stern, strict martinet, but beneath a crusty exterior he had a very kindly soul. But he seldom went ashore himself, took no delight in dances or dinners, fled to his state-room whenever a pretty girl showed her dainty nose above the starboard gangway, and he looked upon a whisky bottle as an ingenious invention of the devil. Now what sympathy can a gentleman, thus unarmed, have for a band of impulsive, full-blooded, thorough-bred Yankee boys? Men's minds and souls are constructed very much on the wireless-telegraphy principle; there must be perfect sympathy to produce the best results. Kimberley's nature, on the contrary, was repellant to the ardent blood surging around him. He was looked to for bread; he gave a stone.

This apparent cynicism was not, however, the product of a cold heart. When you go toiling up the sloping sides of old Mount Vesuvius, you struggle over shale and block and sullen sand; you see Nature in her sternest mood. Poke your stick down anywhere in this forbidding territory, and you find flame and fire below. Such was the case with Kimberley, as I myself know. He had to be poked at to get a glimpse of the really noble nature hidden from the ordinary eye.

A case in point: I disliked to ask my principal for leave to go ashore. The request was almost invariably met by a grimace, as if the nerve of a tooth had been prodded. At length I moved up to the conclusion that he resented my taking advantage of his being at my office table. He appeared to feel that this was an undue advantage taken of an official position.

Acting on this, whenever I wanted very much to go ashore, I would wait until my hero was comfortably seated in the smoking section of the officers' territory, way forward on the port side of the gun deck. He never refused me there; and yet whenever he saw me coming he would attempt to dodge me by making a circuit athwartship or possibly down a convenient hatchway. I beat this by waiting at some point that he would have to pass in his lordly way, and where he could avoid me only by jumping over a hatchway. He seemed to enjoy this, for I could see a twinkle in his eye that seemed to say:

"WANTING TO KNOW MYSELF, WAS HE OR ME CAPTAIN, I UP AND SMASHED HIM IN THE NOSE."

"Well, young fellow, you know what you're about!"

The crew had not my opportunity to dig beneath the crust, hence the discontent and unrest everywhere felt on board. Over 100 of our young men deserted in the early part of the cruise. Gun-drills and sailing manuvers were executed in a "soldiering" sort of way. If there was any emulation at all, it was on the slow man's race principle.

Now I can go back to the commencement of my story to take a fresh start, just as race horses have to, who are trotted over the course so as to get acquainted with the run.

Yes, Dewey was in a brown study. His eye roved listlessly down over the 22 glistening guns that comprised our starboard battery; but the glance gave no gleam of pride; he looked at the whitened deck, sweet and clean as a family breadboard, but it afforded him no pleasure. He gazed idly out of the porthole, and his vision limped laboriously over the stately granite blocks that ran far inward to the sheltered waters of Cherbourg Harbor. Dancing wave and dimpling tide gave him no attraction. In his present mood he would rather see yon amorous wave rise in majestic wrath and with its Titan arms hurl aqueous mountains thundering against the shuddering walls!

The immediate cause of all this disquiet lay in Mr. Dewey's left hand. He had just been handed the findings of a court-martial that had tried Charley Carey, Dick Welch and Pat Ryan. Thirty days on bread and water, in double irons, with loss of pay! These men were all excellent seamen, stationed in the main-top, but they were slaves to liquor. Here was the problem over which Dewey was brooding: How to restore order and beget confidence; in what way to arouse emulation and ambition and to smother discontent.

I soon found that Dewey was Kimberley's opposite. Dewey was soft-spoken, persuasive and insinuating in manner, with a courtly air that won your heart at once. He went freely about the ship; talked directly with the men; learned their needs and wants at first hand, and at the same time discovered their shortcomings.

A change was quickly apparent in the conduct of the crew. The men were beginning to realize that the call of duty was arbitrary, but it had its compensations. A sympathetic chord had been struck, and the better nature was commencing to creep out. The men in the main-top were, however, still a source of trouble and vexation. There was the "Webster-Carey gang," that seemed to be continually on the rampage, and as Dewey sat clutching the court-martial paper in his hand he seemed to be making up his mind to some course of action.

Looking up suddenly, he turned to me and said:

"Writer, call my messenger boy."

I stepped out onto the open deck and found little Johnny Wolfenden playing jackstones with a brother apprentice. I beckoned to him and he came quickly up.

"Boy," said Dewey quietly, "run down and find the Master-at-Arms, and tell him that I want Williams brought up here from the brig. Williams was Captain of the main-top, but had been thrust into the brig the day before for drunkenness.

In a short time the caravan appeared. First the Master-at-Arms, then the sheepish-looking petty officer. Two Ship's Corporals brought up the rear.

"A model Captain of the Top!" sneered Dewey. "Why, sir," continued Dewey, in tones of suppressed anger, "you are expected to be a model of sobriety to your men, not a leader in their crimes."

"I couldn't help it, sir; sure I couldn't. I was perishing with cold, and some one offered me a swallow of whisky."

"Who offered you?" broke in Dewey.

Williams hitched up his trousers, thumbed his cap nervously, gave himself a half hitch to starboard, and said sullenly:

"I dunno, sir; 'twas too dark to see the mate who passed it."

"That is not true, Williams! You are shielding your men in their wrong doing. This only convinces me that I am right in my belief that you are unworthy of your place. A man to control others must first control himself. I shall disrate you, sir! Take off that eagle and get your station as seaman from the Ship's Writer here."

The man humbly touched his cap and sidled up to me. I hastily made out a little memorandum billeting him on the forecastle, to save him the mortification of working with his former subordinates, and he slunk off.

Dewey sat quiet for a few moments, and then called out:

"You, boy! Run up to the Officer of the Deck and ask him to please pass the word for Michael McCarthy and have him report to me at once."

In about five minutes thereafter a short, wiry, red-faced lad with a pair of roving, restless, steel-gray eyes came striding down the deck in our direction, walking with a quick, nervous, jerky gait. Mike weighed about 125 pounds, and at first glance would not be deemed very formidable, but a study of his cat-like, springy step and rapid movements made it evident that he could hold his own in the turbulent crowd in the main-top, where he was stationed.

How different the McCarthy of today! Mike is now Mr. William McCarthy, proprietor of a large sailor boarding-house in San Francisco. Mr. McCarthy is rotund of person, with full, round, swelling cheeks, and with symptoms of a double chin. Clothed in the hight of fashion, Mr. McCarthy furnishes a model for an excellent picture of "Then" and "Now."

Taking off his cap with a nervous swing, the newcomer gave a sort of shuffle that stood for a bow, and then said:

"I'm McCarthy, if you please, sir."

"Ah, yes; and you're an able seaman in the main-top?" said Dewey in the low-pitched, purring tone he adopted when he wanted to be particularly gracious.

"Yes, sir; in the main-top, sir," returned Mac, twiddling his cap in an awkward way.

"Kind of a rough crowd, it would seem; what's the matter with the men there?"

"Matter, sir? Nothin' the matter wid 'em; they do be a little frisky sometimes, but they're all dead game."

"Yes, they do good work when they want to," said Dewey, suggestively.

"Oh, yes, sir; they beat the deck when they git a-goin'."

There was silence for a moment, during which time Dewey studied Mac from head to foot. Suddenly he straightened himself up and said:

"McCarthy, I'm going to make you Captain of the Maintop." This was said with the lordly air of one handing out a grand prize in a big lottery, or a diamond badge.

McCarthy started; he shifted his position from one leg to another; grew still deeper red in the face, and made some circles with his cap.

"If you please, Mister Dewey," he said at length, hesitatingly, "I'd—I'd rather stay wid de boys!"

"What; not want the rating?" asked Dewey, staring as if he could not believe his own ears.

"Yes, sir. No, sir; if you please, sir; I don't want the billet, sir!"

Dewey looked as if a house had fallen down on his hopes, but recovering himself in a moment he said curtly:

"Nonsense! You don't know when you're well off. I intend to rate you as Captain of the Top, and I shall look to you to see that the men do their duty and that you do yours. You may go forward, sir."

There was no more to be said. Dewey arose from his seat with a wave of his hand and Mac saluted and retired, with a rather sullen air.

The next day I was standing on the forecastle just before the time when the starboard watch was piped below. Eight bells had just been struck, when a noisy altercation was heard in the waist of the ship.

Walking slowly down in that direction, I arrived in time to see one of the maintopmen staggering about with a badly contused eye and a profusely bleeding nose. He had evidently not been handled with care.

The Master-at-Arms and a Ship's Corporal or two were already on the ground, and soon out of the tangle our new Captain of the Top emerged under escort of "Jemmy Legs." Mac's eyes were ablaze and his whole manner showed that somebody had waked up his Irish. His clenched fists worked convulsively, and his red hair seemed to stand up straight as if the ship's barber had just cut it pompadour.

Mac was led up to the mainmast and reported to the Officer of the Deck, who happened to be Mr. Sampson, now the much-talked-about Rear-Admiral.

William T. Sampson was at that time the type of a perfect man in form and feature. Tall, broad-shouldered, erect as a pikestaff, with pink cheeks and soft blue eyes and nicely-trimmed blonde beard, he was a model-looking sailor man, but withal he was in great disfavor with the crew of the "Colorado." He was accused of being "too much stuck on his shape." He certainly was lacking in that magnetic power that drew men to Dewey.

Sampson looked at the pugnacious topman with a supercilious air.

"Fighting, eh?" he said, in response to the report of Babcock, the Master-at-Arms.

"Yes, sir," answered Jemmy Legs. "Knocked one of the topmen down as he came from the top."

"Take him below and put him in the brig," said Sampson shortly, preparing to turn on his heel to resume his promenade, trumpet in hand, up and down the quarter deck. It was this habit of taking judgment on the fly, without attempting to dig up the attending facts, that made Sampson so unpopular.

"If you please, Mr. Sampson, I should like to see the First Lieutenant!" broke in McCarthy, taking off his cap and striding excitedly forward.

"Hmmph!" crossly exclaimed the officer; "what do you want to see him for? Want to gain time to invent some more plausible excuse for your outrageous conduct, I suppose."

McCarthy had the good sense to say nothing in answer to this innuendo, but his face flushed and his jaw worked, showing what effort silence cost him. Sampson glared at Mac for a moment and then turned aside and with a surly air bade the messenger boy summon the Executive Officer. It is an arbitrary law in the navy that seamen believing themselves aggrieved may go to the mast and demand to see the Executive or the Captain.

In a few moments Dewey appeared, suave, dignified and soldierly, and yet with, methought, an amused smile lurking under cover of the sweeping coal-black mustache.

"Well, what's the matter now, my man?" he asked, after a few words in an undertone from Sampson.

"You rated me Captain of the Top ferninst me will!" blurted Mac. This was a bad beginning, and Dewey looked grave.

"Yes, my man," said he slowly, "and I asked you to do your duty and keep peace in the top."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Mac, sullenly "but ye sometimes have to fight for peace if yez want it."

"Ah," said Dewey, with a long-drawn tone; "then you have attempted to conquer peace. Come, tell me about it."

"Well, if ye please, sir, Tommy McGinty he was ordered to bring down a block-and-tackle from the top when he came. He didn't do it, and I asked him the whyfore he didn't bring the bit of tackle down, and he wanted to know who I was, and why I didn't bring it down meself if I wanted it, and then he gave me a little push. Wid that, wanting to know meself was he or me Captain, I up and smashed him in the nose. He makes a rush for me and I lets him have it good and hard and lands him."

"Well, well," said Dewey, "this is bad business. Striking a seaman is a violation of the articles of war. We must not allow that. If your man should come to me to complain, I shall have to inquire into the matter. Until then you may go forward and attend to your duty."

Mac strode away and Dewey turned with a satisfied smile to Sampson and said:

"He'll do. There will be no more trouble in the main-top."

Dewey was right. Mac had shown that he could be a boon comrade in a lark on shore, but that on duty aboard the ship duty was duty and there must be no skulking nor back talk. As there were no favors shown and all were treated alike, white-robed Peace folded her wings and roosted in the main-top.

It was this knowledge of men and his knack of getting the best results that enabled Dewey to make the "Colorado" the best-drilled ship in European waters.

She Was Not Economical.

Benham—Do you remember that before we were married you said you could never be a poor man's wife?

Mrs. Benham—Well, I wasn't, was I?

Benham—No, but you will be soon if you keep on at the rate you are going now.

Clare—It's a thrilling story, isn't it?

Maud—One of the most thrilling I ever read. I couldn't skip more than half of it.—Detroit Free Press.